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Netflix's 'Baby Reindeer' Is a Brilliant and Jarring Account of Stalking, Victimization and Emotional Turmoil: TV Review

By [Aramide Tinubu](#)



Ed Miller/Netflix

In his seven-part [Netflix](#) miniseries, “[Baby Reindeer](#),” adapted from his one-man show, Scottish writer and comedian [Richard Gadd](#) recounts the true story of being harassed and stalked for years. Compelling and unsettling, Gadd, who portrays Donny Dunn, the fictionalized version of himself, transports the audience to one of the most painful periods of his life. The series untangles the nuances of his

emotions, his stalker's temperament and past incidents that fortified his frame of mind at the time. Shocking, hilarious, painful and devastating, "Baby Reindeer" is a rare gem on television, reminding us of what is possible in the medium.

"Baby Reindeer" opens as Donny walks into a London police station. Frazzled and exhausted, he explains that an unstable woman has been stalking him for months. Unfortunately, despite his evident anxiety, the police officer doesn't have any real solutions for him. As the story rewinds six months, viewers also learn that Donny hasn't been entirely truthful about the situation.

A fledgling twenty-something comic, Donny spends his days as a bartender at a local pub and his nights shut away in a bedroom at his ex-girlfriend Keeley's (Shalom Brune-Franklin) mom's home. On a seemingly ordinary day, a frumpy middle-aged woman named Martha (Jessica Gunning) walks into the bar. Seeing she's near tears, Donny offers her a cup of tea. When she explains she can't afford it, he gives her one on the house, lighting her mood immediately. Just as quickly, Martha begins talking ad nauseam about her work as an attorney and her palatial home, as she gives Donny endless compliments. While the barman entertains her, he also knows her stories don't add up.

Still, Martha's brash personality and shocking laugh don't stop Donny from indulging her. Soon, she's coming to the bar daily, sitting through his shifts and bestowing him with the nickname "Baby Reindeer." When Donny finally tries to let Martha down gently, she's unwilling to let go of the illusion she's conjured up about what they mean to one another. Instead, she begins infiltrating every segment of Donny's existence, including his standup shows and his personal life, which involve Teri (Nava Mau), a therapist he's recently begun dating.

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Only lightly fictionalized, Gadd illustrates Martha's escalations through countless misspelled and jarring emails (upward of 40,000 in real life) ranging from fawning over Donny to threats and unwanted sexual innuendos. Gunning is also thrilling to watch as Martha, whose moods swing wildly from one second to the next, and who is obviously navigating a world and experience no one can see but her. Though Donny is victimized, Gadd is careful not to cast him as a victim without any agency. Instead, Episode 4, which follows Donny five years prior, is a searing account of the circumstances that inform the comedian's present state of mind. The audience learns why, in spite of all of the warning signs, he makes some excruciating

choices amid Martha's harassment, allowing himself to be flattered by her constant attention.

Like Michaela Coel's HBO series, "I May Destroy You," Gadd's "Baby Reindeer" is a vulnerable and candid account of varied abuses, and how they can echo through every chamber of someone's life. In seven episodes, Gadd illustrates how Martha's obsession with Donny becomes both a nuisance and a morbid fascination for him. Moreover, the series also tackles gender biases, since the male/female roles in this harassment story are flipped.

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Dark and brilliant, "Baby Reindeer" carefully unpacks the frailties of human emotion and mental illness. Raw and sometimes humorous, the audience learns more about Donny and the complexities and events that have shaped his humanity. As the series closes, we are forced to confront the lies we tell ourselves and others and how all of those things affect the ways in which we show up in the world – and what we deem acceptable.

All episodes of "Baby Reindeer" are streaming on Netflix.

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